

Reston Master Plan Special Study Task Force

Writing Group Meeting

Thursday, April 18, 20 13
Reston Association

Task Force Attendees: Mark Looney, Terry Maynard, Patty Nicoson, Bill Penniman, Judy Pew, Joe Stowers, Matt Valentini, Kohann Williams

Others: Joe Kelly, Heidi Merkel, Fairfax County Planning Staff

Announcements

Mark Looney mentioned the upcoming virtual Rail-ty tour sponsored by the Greater Reston Chamber of Commerce on April 19, 2013 at the Westin Dulles Airport Hotel.

Patty Nicoson mentioned that there had been a meeting of the Fairfax County staff and property owners on the south side of the Wiehle-Reston East Metrorail station to discuss station access issues. Vornado was present. Chris Wells had mentioned that work was underway on a pedestrian path along Wiehle Avenue that would be lead to the access pavilion on the south side of the station.

Fairfax County Transportation Analysis. There was considerable discussion of the transportation analysis that had been presented to the full Task Force at the April 8 meeting.

Patty Nicoson noted that staff had said it was going to do additional analysis working with the property owners to figure out where the grid of streets would be located. The task force subcommittees had proposed grids for the large land base bays around the transit station areas and Reston Town Center North to make possible more urban site designs on smaller blocks.

Based on this collaboration, staff will code additional links in the transportation network. It will enable them to get better results from the transportation model.

Mark Looney said of the process ahead of us that it would be long and agonizing. Staff will have to figure out the grid based on the development applications in the Reston area pipeline. Fairfax County does not condemn land. The grid will be based in part on Virginia Department of Transportation access management standards. Staff will identify missing links.

Bill Penniman asked whether we could expect the property owners to get together and figure out where the grid should be. **Mark Looney** responded that this is not a sure thing. In Tysons, there are developers who don't want to spend money now on making street improvements.

Judith Pew noted that we should include in our planning the needed long-term improvements such as, in addition to the Soapstone crossing, the crossings at South Lakes and Reston Town Center.

Heidi Merkle picked up on Mark's comments and said that the County is not going to buy land for the grid. If the property owners are not interested in coming in, it will not get built. This is an incentive-based process. **Joe Stowers** noted that the county had experience in this area.

Terry Maynard noted that he and Patty had met with Walter Alcorn to learn about the Tysons planning experience. He was concerned about the proposed draft Comprehensive Plan language that had been presented by staff. There is a grade separated crossing at Fairfax County Parkway and Sunrise Valley Drive and seven gateway crossings. All of these need to be level of service E in the peak period, which is defined as less than 80 seconds of delay at an intersection.

Heidi Merkel noted that many of these intersections today are level of service F. She was unsure about the benefit of insisting on level of service E.

Joe Stowers said he didn't think we should get involved with this level of detail, that staff would be doing a lot of work to address reducing congestion.

Terry Maynard emphasized that we need to know where we are and where we want to go. **Patty Nicoson** noting the need to reduce congestion suggested one standard to consider was non-degradation - that the traffic congestion should not get worse while we work to make it better. Some intersections have more than one and one-half minutes of delay today; some movements have considerably more delay.

Terry Maynard said there ought to be reasonable opportunities to drive north/south in Reston. He was concerned that the north and south Reston not be cut off by congestion around the Dulles Toll Road.

Matt Valentini said the emphasis should be on buses and bike and pedestrian-friendly connections. Reston is a major employment center. There are a lot of trips to work today. Adding residents and retail could reduce the number of vehicle trips.

Terry Maynard noted that he'd been to a number of the County bus meetings. They were all oriented to consumers. **Patty Nicoson** noted that development could be tied to transportation improvements being completed (as was done in Tysons).

Terry Maynard said that we should not have gridlock. He passed out some diagrams and charts showing delay at the intersections. **Joe Stowers** noted that the Master Planning process is a long-term one. The community would be better to focus on short-term improvements. He handed out a paper that criticized the staff's transportation evaluation process and had some of his recommendations on it.

Joe Stowers repeated his suggestion that staff look at improving the grid of streets and the four intersections that would permit traffic to bypass the congested Wiehle Avenue/Sunset Hills Road intersection. These were already at signalized intersections, and three of the improvements could be done relatively easily. Staff should also focus on signing (no left turns?). Joe said that you could remove a small percentage of traffic this way and that although small these improvements could really help improve the

level of service. You could also make the streets friendlier to pedestrians and bicyclists.

Bill Penniman thought that it was fair to have a target for level of service (LOS). He wanted to think through how to do it. He was not sure that we would want level of service as a standard. The worst time is the rush hour and that is what we are talking about.

Joe Stowers said there should be a high priority placed on completing the Reston Boulevard (adjacent to Comstock's Reston Station project). The Soapstone crossing will encourage cycling and walking. While some senior citizens may prefer two drive cars, there are a number who want to reduce car use or cannot drive for whom walking or taking transit including feeder buses would be preferable.

Mark Looney said that we should keep in mind that we are projecting present day experiences into the future. For example, today we might go to a favorite grocery store that is on the other side of the DTR from where we live. The same is true of visits to the dentist, optometrists, etc. All of this will change over time. There will be new developments with new retail facilities and services. These will make them much more accessible to people within shorter distances. For example, if you got a Whole Foods on the south side, this would reduce the need to cross the DTR. The percent of people who bike today is 5 to 10 percent. We want more bikers.

Joe Stowers said that estimates of future pedestrians and bicyclists were already in the transportation model.

Mark Looney said that there seemed to be a fallacy in the model approach. People's habits will change in the future. Tell me my travel options and the time it will take. If a bus takes less time than driving, he would take the bus. People will change behaviors over time. It is an evolving process. **Joe Stowers** said that staff could make forecasts that are reasonable.

Patty Nicoson said that staff was going to work on the details of the intersections as part of the future transportation work.

Terry Maynard noted that region wide, there is only a 1 percent shift to transit projected. He hoped that this was at least 10 percent higher in Reston. When someone referred to the Arlington model, Terry noted that there were at least eight street crossings of I-66 within a short distance. Reston is proposed to have only five crossings.

Joe Stowers said it was more important to see what the community said about travel in Reston. And he again emphasized that staff were going to do more detailed transportation analyses after the plan was adopted.

Bill Penniman asked that when developers go in for a rezoning, how do they address LOS E and F? It is a dynamic process.

Mark Looney said he expected the Fairfax board to adopt Comprehensive Plan language, and that staff will spend two years doing detailed transportation analyses. The analyses will be done with more refined information. Then we will see how the roads function. Maybe staff will propose requiring six lanes where there are four lanes of traffic today. In other cases, where there are four lanes, we might only need two lanes for traffic. One example is Reston Boulevard.

No one really knows what will happen. The County will do an area-wide transportation analysis. The owners will provide input into that analysis.

Matt Valentini said that the developer's transportation analysis would have to consider background traffic, existing traffic, traffic that will be generated by its development and traffic from future developments that are in the pipeline.

Mark Looney said that Reston would need interim improvements. Developers will need to demonstrate that these interim improvements will function. We will also need to identify 40-year improvements and the standard for or timeline when they will need to be provided.

Bill Penniman asked if developers would have to do transportation analyses?

Mark Looney said the way the process would work is that developers would sit around the table with county staff and interact and provide feedback. Staff will collect data and ultimately make the analysis. But it is a collaborative process

Terry Maynard said that he had requested information about the existing delay at intersections. What is the current through traffic? The current use of Wiehle Avenue?

Mark Looney reflected on the history of transportation planning and noted that elected officials had taken north-south connections off the regional plans 50 years ago. Today, there were only five n/s links serving Northern Virginia: Hunter Mill Road, Wiehle Avenue, Reston Parkway, Fairfax County Parkway, Centerville Road and Route 28 and in Loudoun, Loudoun County Parkway. There is no river crossing between the Beltway and Route 15. Everyone has to go east/west in order to go north/south. This contributes to additional through traffic on streets.

Judith Pew said that we needed analyses of the other crossings of the DTR. **Heidi Merkle** responded that there were more studies under way.

Patty Nicoson asked if there were many developers currently working with the County who would like to submit applications in the near term? **Mark Looney** thought there might be around five.

Heidi Merkel said in response to a question about the status of the Soapstone study that the consultants would come in soon with their recommendations for two possible alignments.

Draft Task Force Report

Patty Nicoson passed out copies of the summary section of the Task Force Draft Report that she had been editing. She had changed the verbs in discussing the vision to the present tense

and those in discussing the transit station areas to the future tense, i.e. “will” do something.

Patty Nicoson also said she thought that the development in Reston Town Center was tied to achieving traffic trip reduction goals.

Heidi Merkel said that trip reduction was tied to the rezoning of Reston Town Center. Development would be tied to providing transportation improvements to address increases in vehicle trips being provided. In the early days of Reston, it was easy to deal with a single owner/developer to achieve these kinds of agreements. Heidi thought that it would be much more difficult today under different circumstances and with a number of additional property owners.

Bill Penniman asked Terry Maynard if he would be okay with scenario E if the level of service E could be achieved?

Terry Maynard said he would be. He didn't care how LOS E was achieved as long as it was. He was concerned with addressing the needs of the community (including reduced congestion).

Matt Valentini said that we ought to be guided by the changing demographics in Reston. Developers would need the opportunity to address the needs of a younger generation that prefers living in apartments, uses electronic devices to get much of its information, and prefers to take transit and bike and walk. We should be encouraging people to live like this.

Judy Pew felt we should say that we are working to achieve certain desired elements, such as the roadway crossings, in the report. We need to be able to analyze if Fairfax County is achieving the plan's goals.

The meeting ended with **Patty Nicoson** saying she would be working with Bill Penniman and Van Foster on continuing to revise the draft task force report including working to add information on households, square feet of development: current, in the current comprehensive plan, and proposed. She had provided a list of charts and tables included in the 2001 task

force report. This information should also be considered for inclusion in the current task force report along with updated information.

The next meeting of the task force is scheduled for May 14. No date was set for the next meeting of the writing group.

Patty Nicoson

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